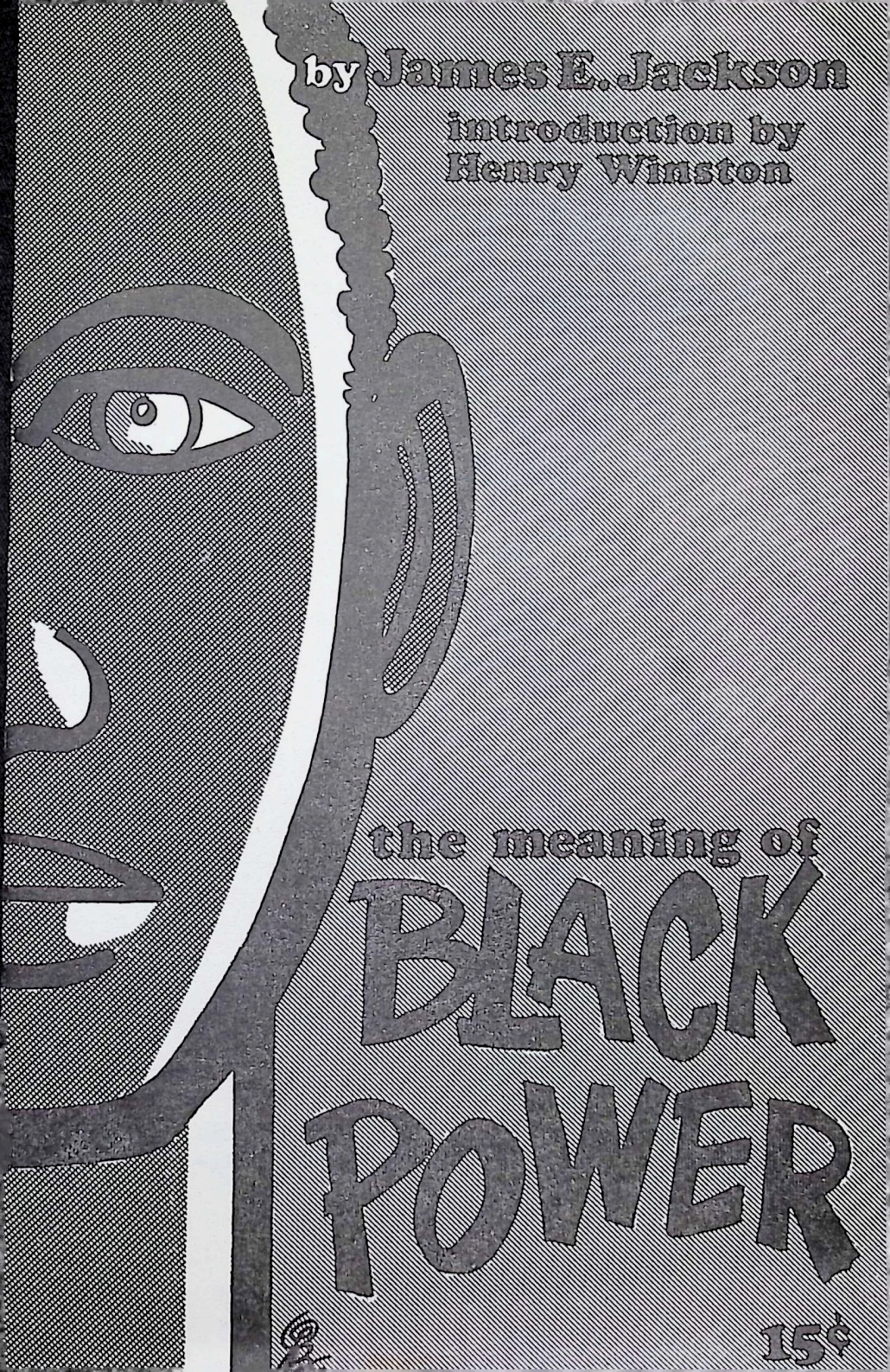
by James E. Jackson
introduction by
Henry Winston
the meaning of
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The Meaning of "Black Power"

By JAMES E. JACKSON

With an introduction by
HENRY WINSTON

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INTRODUCTION

The real substance of the slogan "Black Power" corresponds to the innermost desires of the Negro people and all democratic white masses to put an end to Jim Crowism, segregation and discrimination and for the achievement of full equality for the Negro people in the United States.

The fight to put an end to second-class citizenship for the Negro people is at this moment the very heart of the struggle for democracy for *all the people of the United States.*

It is necessary to see the relationship of the struggle for Negro rights to the total fight against reaction and fascism which expresses itself on the one hand in the criminal war of aggression against the people of Vietnam, and on the other, in the spread of racist ideas and racist practices against the Negro people.

In this pamphlet, James E. Jackson, publisher of *The Worker,* exposes the conscious and deliberate distortions of the slogan "Black Power" by those whose aim is to conceal this simple truth. This outstanding Communist makes a significant contribution to this discussion in which an entire people seeks to find a meaningful and effective path of struggle to bring about economic, political and social equality.

The author was born in Richmond, Va. 51 years ago and has been a life-long student and participant in the struggle for Negro rights. He is a graduate of Virginia Union and Howard Universities and was one of the field research workers for Gunnar Myrdal's *America's Dilemma.* Jackson was one of the founders of the Southern Negro Youth Congress and for many years played an outstanding role in the South for the right of Negroes to vote, against the poll tax and against lily-white primaries. He was also among the early pioneers seeking to organize the unorganized in the South and helped to organize the tobacco workers in Virginia.

The name James E. Jackson is associated with all of the major democratic struggles and in particular the struggle for Negro rights of the '30s, '40s, '50s and '60s, in the North as well as in the South.

James E. Jackson, one of the leaders of the Communist Party of the United States, distinguished himself during the darkest days of the '50s when all aspects of liberty were attacked. He drafted the *Common Program for the South* which played a big part in helping to rally democratic masses in the South against the McCarthyite-Dixiecrat-Ku Klux Klan alliance and helped to create more favorable conditions for today's struggle for full equality in the South.

It is urged that this essay, which expresses the viewpoint of the Communist Party, U.S.A., be carefully read and studied.

HENRY WINSTON
National Chairman, C.P.U.S.A.

JAMES E. JACKSON

The Meaning of "Black Power"

From the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott, which the Reverend Martin Luther King led in 1956, to the Freedom March through Mississippi which James Meredith initiated on June 5 of this year, the struggle of Negro Americans to secure their citizenship rights to full political, economic and social equality has been the most visible battle banner on the frontier of social progress in our country for a decade.

Enormous energy has been expended in great mass actions of Negroes and their white supporters in dramatizing the demands for equality and freedom and for an end to segregation and discrimination. In these struggles men, women and youth of the Negro freedom movement have made many sacrifices. Scores have been martyred; thousands have been imprisoned; schools, churches and homes have been bombed. When contrasted with the situation that prevailed a decade ago, the Negro freedom movement can take justifiable pride in the significant gains which its militant struggles have forced the ruling class to yield. However, when measured against the rights which white Americans take for granted as their birthright, and when weighed against the suffering and sacrifices exacted in the last decade of hard fought battles, the advances which Negro Americans have made toward the goal of equality and freedom have indeed been insubstantial. All of the key indices of their special oppression remain as before: Negroes are the most disfranchised politically, the most jobless and underemployed economically; in terms of social well-being they are the most deprived—ill-housed, medically uncared-for, educationally and culturally denied, their dignity as human beings is constantly violated by anti-Negro slurs and defamation, by the practices and precepts of the doctrine of white racist supremacy.

After a decade of pragmatic pursuit of obvious objectives essential for the attainment of a status of equality with all other citizens, the need for a summing-up of experience and the definition of a theory of Negro freedom as an aid and guide to the further development of the movement has become a matter of concern to the leadership.

The Concept of Black Power

The catch-phrase or slogan of Black Power has emerged as a rather sensationalized by-product of the new endeavors of Negro leadership

to formulate a strategic and tactical pattern of guidelines, to elaborate a theory of the advance of the Negro freedom movement.

The primary use of the term Black Power was in connection with the campaigns to boost the registration by Negroes for the right to vote. It was also used to describe the consequence of Negroes withholding their purchasing power against stores which discriminated against them; it was used to describe the potential power of the economic boycott in the tactical armory of the local Negro community. Stokely Carmichael, Chairman of SNCC, put the phrase Black Power into sloganized form during speeches on the 260-mile Meredith Mississippi Freedom March. In doing so he was seeking to generalize certain positive experience of the Lowndes County, Alabama Freedom Organization which had fielded an all-Negro (Black Panther) party in the local elections this year. His central emphasis was that Negroes should not hesitate to utilize situations where they are forced into a separated majority of the population "to grasp the political power in those areas where Negroes predominate." Elaborating on this particular concept behind the phrase, Black Power, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party leader, Mrs. Victoria Gray, said in a press interview:

> The MFDP is interested in consolidating a base of power in the black community. This is our concern.
>
> But we are not interested basically in color—and we have said this in our campaign. Our interest is in changing the political and the economic system of this entire state and this ultimately involves white people as well as blacks. But this does not have to be a contradiction with the SNCC concept of Black Power.

In a declaration printed as an ad broadside in the *New York Times* of July 31, a National Committee of Negro Churchmen issued a statement on Black Power signed by some 30 prominent Negro clergymen of major denominations. They expressed themselves that: "Powerlessness breeds a race of beggars. . . . Having no power to implement the demands of conscience, the concern for justice is transmuted into a distorted form of love, which, in the absence of justice, becomes chaotic self-surrender. . . . A more equal sharing of power is precisely what is required as the precondition of authentic human interaction. . . ." What the "disinherited" must have, the clergymen point out, is an increased "capacity to participate with power—i.e., to have some organized political and economic strength to really influence people with whom one interacts. . . ." They declared, further, that

"Negroes need power in order to participate more effectively at all levels of the life of our Nation."

Essentially, there is general agreement among Negro spokesmen today that the chant, "Black Power," is reflective of a determination on the part of the Negro Freedom Movement to build up a maximum strength of united action in all situations in which Negroes are the preponderant number in the total,, to create local bases of political power and economic strength, and thereby transform their isolated ghettos into positions of influence, of "Black Power."

This aspect of the concept of Black Power corresponds very much to what has been stated in the Resolution on the Negro Question of the Communist Party in this regard. The Communist Party's position adopted at its 17th Convention in 1959 and affirmed and further elaborated at its 18th Convention in June of this year, stated that:

> Negro Americans are determined to build ever closer their unity in order to wage the struggle even more militantly to break down all remaining barriers to their exercise of any and all political economic and social rights enjoyed by other citizens.
>
> The great masses of Negroes unite not in order to separate themselves from the life of the country. They unite to more effectively employ the strength of their own numbers and the weight of their alliances with other parts of the population to level all barriers to their fullest integration into all aspects of the economic, political and social life of the American people as a whole. They are forging an internal unity to facilitate their struggle for integration as free and equal American citizens.

And several years in advance of the current concern with this aspect of the problems of the movement, the Communist Party pointed out the dialectical relationship of the work to utilize local situations where Negro voters constituted the majority as bases of local political power to strengthen the overall struggle for genuine representative government. We said:

> The Negro people in the United States must secure their rightful share of governmental power. In those urban and rural communities where they are the larger part of the population generally, and in the deep South areas where they are the larger part of the population particularly, they must constitute the majority power of government.
>
> In its essence, therefore, the struggle for the rights of the Negro people is not merely a "civil rights" fight, it is a political struggle for the power to secure and safeguard the freedom of a people. . . .
>
> It is a struggle for a just share of representation nationally; it

is a struggle for majority rule in those localities where Negroes are the dominant people in the population.

The Total Program

The Communist Party has long recognized that the struggle to create the conditions for the Negro people to exercise the power in the areas of their majority is an important part of the true program for Negro freedom. Yet, this does not and cannot justify the requirements of the whole of Negro people. In terms of the country as a whole, Negro Americans are more often than not cast in a minority situation, therefore, the fight to guarantee fullest protection and enforcement of the equal rights of the minority is no less important to the cause of Negro freedom. Also, the struggle against prejudice and racist practices and the fortification and enforcement of an adequate body of law against victimization and discrimination of individuals because of race and color remains an important part of the program for fulfilling the rights of the Negro people. Indeed, the absence of prejudice means a Negro should enjoy the right to fill any position which he or she is capable of regardless of the proportion of Negroes in the given situation.

The perspective and struggle to establish Black Power bases of local political control in the deep South and in metropolitan slums of the North ought not to be confused with any notions of Negro exclusiveness or political isolationism. Such Black Power positions of strength would prove useful to a total strategy for Negro freedom only insofar as they enhanced the capability of the Negro movement to consumate more favorable alliance relations with comparable disadvantaged and objectively "anti-establishment" classes and forces among the white population.

The mass of Negroes who are poor and working-class have no choice but to seek to effect alliances with the comparably disadvantaged whites who are exploited by the ruling class of monopolist interests which dominate the society. Black Power of itself is not and cannot be sufficient to overcome the tyranny of the power of the monopoly capitalists. Theirs is the power behind Negro enslavement as well as working class exploitation in the final analysis. Theirs is the power that stands astride the path of progress toward freedom for the Negro people and social advance for the nation. To win significant victories from it will require not only the maximum united action of the Negro people but Negro and white working-class unity in allied and coordinated struggle against the common oppressor and in behalf

of the common goals of the poor and the exploited. The National Committee of Negro Churchmen gave an excellent expression of this strategic necessity of seeking a fighting alliance relationship with social forces in the population who are objectively "going our way" in order to fashion the scale of power required to win. They said:

> We must organize not only among ourselves but with other groups in order that we can, together, gain power sufficient to change this nation's sense of what is NOW important and what must be done NOW . . . We and all other Americans are one. Our history and destiny are indissolubly linked. If the future is to belong to any of us, it must be prepared for all of us whatever our racial or religious backgrounds . . . we are persons and the power of all groups must be wielded to make visible our common humanity.

There are other concepts associated with the discussion about Black Power which are of significance to the further development of the practical activity of the movement as well as relating to the theory of the freedom movement.

One of these is the concept of the reestablishment of Negro hegemony over the leadership of all major departments of the Negro freedom movement. This is a demand for a new quality to Negro-white relations within the Negro freedom movement; it demands an end to all paternalistic and privileged assumptions on the part of white participants in the Negro freedom movement; that is to say, the white supporters of the movement must not arrogate to themselves roles of super-advisors of the leadership as the price for their participation. Also, leadership of such organizations as SNCC and CORE have called for a greater sensitivity to the mores of the Negro community on the part of white workers in the movement so as not to affront the dignity of those very people with whom they have joined for the fight. In general, these organizations have called for their white supporters to make their first concentration in the working class areas of the adjacent white communities. Especially do the Negro leaders now challenge the organized labor movement to make their support to the cause of Negro freedom more visible and more substantial in terms of policing their own unions, areas of influence and authority for ending discriminatory practices in employment, housing, upgrading, appprenticeship and other training programs, and election to union office. Above all, Negro leaders demand of the labor leaders that they carry through the long awaited task of undertaking the organization of the unorganized Southern workers, Negro and white, of factory and farm.

Another question which has been given widespread discussion in connection with the dialogue on the theory and practice of the Negro freedom movement, which the Black Power issue triggered, has been that of the effect of the foreign policy of the government upon the goals of the Negro people.

Never before have so substantial a section of the Negro leadership come out in vigorous opposition to a war in which the U.S. government was engaged. In the past, individual Negro leaders have opposed various foreign policies and particular acts of aggression by the government, but never before have entire organizations of the Negro people—as is the case in respect to SNCC and CORE—come out in unequivocal denunciation of a war in which a high proportion of Negro soldiers have been impressed, to kill and be killed. In addition to Carmichael and McKissick, leaders of SNCC and CORE respectively, the Nobel Peace Prize winner and best known Negro leader, Reverend Martin Luther King, has come out against the war which the Johnson government wages in Vietnam. The resistance of Negroes to Johnson's genocidal war against the people of Vietnam is not only disclosed in the position of its civil rights leaders and clergymen, but in the growing number of Negro youth who defy the draft boards, the army induction centers, and in the number of Negro soldiers in the U.S. armed forces' stockades in Vietnam who resist serving on "hunt-and-kill" missions against the people of Vietnam.

Carmichael, McKissick, King and others have raised the banner of anti-imperialist solidarity between the Negroes of the United States and the victims of U.S. imperialist aggression in Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, as well as African and Latin American countries as a vital strategy for uniting the cause of Negro freedom with the interests of the majority of mankind. They have pointed out that for the American Negro to adopt a position in support of U.S. imperialist policies of aggression and war—as in respect to Vietnam—would be to isolate themselves from the overwhelming majority of mankind. This represents not only a meaningful contribution of Negro Americans to the growing power of the world front to force the U.S. government to quit Vietnam but it also represents a new depth of comprehension of the true nature of the social and class forces within the country and the world arena on the part of an important sector of the Negro freedom movement. It has demonstrated by its opposition to the Vietnam war that it associates the destiny of the just cause of

Negro freedom with the main social tendency of our epoch and is not beguiled by the apparent overriding power of U.S. imperialism.

Distorted Views

Seeking sensations and fostering all opportunities for divisionism and conflict among the component sections of the Negro freedom movement, and between Negro and white, the press and television have been waving the phrase Black Power before the eyes of the nation with alarming interpretations. It is represented as a black nationalist answer to white supremacy and as the doctrine for a ghetto rising of blacks against whites in the great cities of the country.

The ideological provocateurs of the press find some encouragement for their sensationalizing of parodies of concepts about the Black Power phrase in some speeches and articles of certain Negro spokesmen who sometimes endow the two words with powers that they cannot and should not possess. At times they even suggest that by uniting their own strength, Negroes can go it alone, by virtue of the fact that they would "control" politically the central-cities of a score of metropolitan centers of the country. What these poorly informed speakers and demagogic commentators like the *Liberator* magazine's editorial writer forget, or don't know, is the actual nature of the "power structure" in this country: the corporate elite of monopolists whose power over the Congress, the White House and the Pentagon rests on the solid material base of de facto ownership of the vast majority of the whole economy.

Also, in responding to the atrocities of the police against the Negro marchers struggling to push back the walls of their ghettos to enlarge the living space and secure some job opportunities, some speakers have suggested that Negroes could organize their own policing system to counter the violence of the racists and the police.

The concept of self-defense is a well established practice in life on the part of American working people. Furthermore, it is given official sanction in the Constitution of the U.S. The right of the Negro community or of an individual Negro citizen to armed self-defense in face of wanton assault by mobsters, racists, or other lawless elements is one of the manhood rights of citizens of this country and does not need the advocacy of anyone. The fact that circumstances have prevailed where Negroes have been abandoned to mob terror by law enforcement authorities—and indeed in many situations the officers of the law, sheriffs and policemen, have themselves committed "the deeds most foul"—does not make the responsibility of the Federal

Government any less for securing the lives and property of Negroes, while protecting them in the full exercise of their constitutional rights to a non-segregated participating share in public affairs anywhere in this country. Negroes have in the past and will in the future defend themselves against racist violence, but their demand remains for the government to discharge its duty to safeguard the lives and property of all of its citizens in the exercise of their constitutional rights.

The widespread discussion which has developed about the several interpretations of the cry of Black Power, which was raised by marchers on the walk from Memphis to Jackson last June, is part of a seeking for sound theory to illuminate the pathway of progress for the Negro freedom movement.

The Communist Party has already made important contributions in elaborating theoretical problems and strategic concepts of the Negro freedom movement. As the leadership of the mass movement now addresses itself to the problem of historic direction and relationship of the Negro people's cause to the goals of peace and the change of the system of society itself, the Communists will continue to make key contributions.

Negro Freedom and the Class Struggle

In summary, we fully support the struggle of the Negro people to secure the power required to free themselves from racist tyranny, exploitation and social discrimination. At the same time we point out that the struggle for winning freedom has to be waged in more areas then just those situations in which Negroes constitute the majority.

It is clearly evident, that for the Freedom Movement to accumulate the power required to secure full freedom, more than political and organizational build-up of "Black Power," more than the self-organization and militant action of the Negro people themselves is required.

It is necessary to win broad strata of the white masses to an active participation in the struggle for the freedom rights of the Negro people. On the basis of mutual advantage and advanced self-interest, it is necessary and possible to establish a fighting partnership between the Negro freedom movement and the organized labor movement, and with various organized catagories of the population who are victimized by the monopolists' establishment. Already extensive joint-actions between the Negro freedom movement and the peace movement to end the war in Vietnam have taken place and continue to develop.

Negro Americans, being overwhelmingly working people, are victimized by class exploitation; the racism deprivation and discrimination which they suffer is the systematic super-exploitation and robbery practiced in accord with the laws of the system upon the most underprivileged part of the nation's working people, the Negro people. Therefore, the struggle of the Negro people for freedom can be viewed as a specialized part of the general class struggle of the jobless and working poor against the reign of the monopolists—the working class against the capitalist class. The flaming struggle for Negro freedom which rages these days in the streets of the great cities as well as along the rural roads and in the country towns, is a part of the revolutionary processes which are rending the old social system beyond repair. This ongoing struggle constitutes a powerful wing of the front of working-class and anti-monopoly people's struggle for those programs which will open the way to bringing into being a new order—socialism.

> The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions, yet made to her August claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing and for the time being putting all other humanists to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be struggle. Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did, and it never will.
>
> FREDERICK DOUGLASS

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